

## Philbrick Captures Crowd

By MORAG MACLACHLAN

"Is it working now?" Helen Philbrick said into the microphone with a laugh.

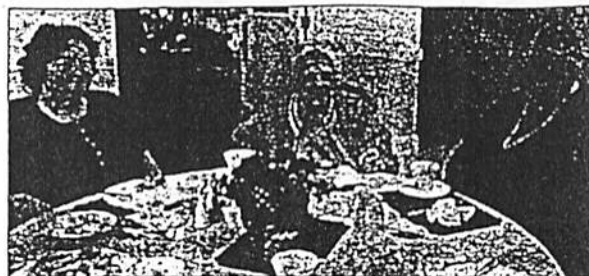
The crowd gathered at the Senior Center Wednesday morning nodded, eagerly waiting to hear Philbrick read from her latest book *Journeys with a Real Jack in the Pulpit*.

Philbrick then touched the silver, circular pin hanging from her sweater explaining that the piece of jewelry rep-

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Helen Philbrick, 96, has taken a break from penning books about gardening to write a memoir about the characters she and her husband encountered over the years.



Leslie Godfrey, Philbrick and Betty Hills sat together for the breakfast in Philbrick's honor held at the Senior Center.

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resented her birth sign of Pisces.

"This is so overwhelming. I don't know where to begin," Philbrick said. "They say Pisces can never make a decision. That's why this pin has one fish swimming one way and one swimming another."

Philbrick decided to start with the title. She said a Jack in the Pulpit is actually a plant. Her neighbor planted one beside their home when Philbrick and her husband John, a minister at St. John's Church, moved in.

"The title is really a practical joke," Philbrick said slyly.

It's Philbrick's quiet wit that helped attract an audience.

"We heard it was standing room only when she spoke at the library," said Senior Center Activities Coordinator Linda Hayes. "I thought, 'We have Helen come here four times a week. She should speak here.'"

Philbrick, who turned 96 on Thursday, teaches a caning class and takes a tai chi class at the Senior Center. That Philbrick doesn't act her age is no surprise to her friend of 16 years, Betty Hills.

"We met at the historical society," Hill recalled. "I enjoy her very much."

Philbrick also drew residents whom she had never met to the event.

"I've had friends in common with Helen for years, but this is the first time we've met," said Leslie Godfrey of Teakettle Lane.

One friend Godfrey and Philbrick had in common was town historian and John Alden descendant, Russell Edwards.

"Russell always told stories in a fast manner," Philbrick said, adding that Edwards discovered the original foundation of the John Alden House in town.

Snippets from the lives of many Duxbury residents can be found in Philbrick's new novel. Philbrick explained her motivation for writing this book was to preserve the

records and works of the different people she and her husband encountered over the years. She entertained the crowd with several excerpts from her book.

"Does anyone remember Ray Taylor?" Philbrick asked. "I remember him walking the streets humming a hymn played at church the previous Sunday."

Philbrick then read from her book about a time that the police picked up Taylor and gave him a ride home. During the drive, Taylor turned to the officer and said "Mr. Philbrick's a nice man. He gave me a dime, but nothing's open."

This was the first of many stories Philbrick shared about her 47 years with her husband. She read about the time that her husband was to preside over Ann Kent's wedding. A hearse pulled up to Kent's parents' home on Washington Street causing a neighbor to think something had happened to the bride's mother. In actuality, Philbrick explained, it was the bridegroom who used the hearse to accommodate his ski equipment.

The morning flew by quickly as the soft-spoken Philbrick would chuckle to herself before reading a passage to the crowd. She laughed as she spoke of Johnny Cat, a cross-eyed Siamese cat that called the church home.

"Johnny Cat loved people and would run up the driveway on Sunday mornings as people drove in," Philbrick said. She then related a tale about the time the choir director used one of Johnny Cat's front paws to direct the choir.

"I couldn't put the book down," 100-year-old Winnie D'Amelio said after having Philbrick sign her copy of the book.

As a line began to form around a smiling Philbrick, Hayes looked on pleased with the event's success.

"We hope to do more authors' series," she said. "Featuring the history of our seniors is quite popular."